Gunner Depew

By

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GUNNER DEPEW SHOWS THE POILUS HOW AN AMERICAN NAVAL GUNNER CAN SHOOT.

Synopsis.—Albert N. Depew, author of the story, tells of his service in the United States navy, during which he attained the rank of chief petty officer, first-class gunner. The world war starts soon after he receives his honorable discharge from the navy, and he leaves for France with a determination to enlist.

CHAPTER III.
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In the Foreign Legion.

This time I was determined to enlist. So, when we landed at St. Nazaire, I drew my pay from the Virginian and, after spending a week with my grandmother, I went out and asked the first gendarme I met where the enlistment station was. I had to argue with him some time before he would even direct me to it. Of course I had no passport and this made him suspicious of me.

The officer in charge of the station was no warmer in his welcome than the gendarme, and this surprised me, because Murray and Brown had no trouble at all in joining. The French, of course, often speak of the Foreign Legion as "the convicts," because so many legionaries are wanted by the police of their respective countries, but a criminal record never had been a bar to service with the legion, and I did not see why it should be now—if they suspected me of having one. I had heard there were not a few Germans in the legion—later on I became acquainted with some—and believe me, no Alsatian ever fought harder against the Huns than these former Deutschlanders did. It occurred to me then that if they thought I was a German, because I had no passport, I might have to prove I had been in trouble with the kaiser's crew before they would accept me. I do not know what the real trouble was, but I solved the problem by showing them my discharge papers from the American navy. Even then, they were suspicious because they thought I was too young to have been a C. P. O. When they challenged me on this point, I said I would prove it to them by taking an examination.

They examined me very carefully, in English, although I know enough French to get by on a subject like gunnery. But foreign officers are very proud of their knowledge of English—and most of them can speak it—and I think this one wanted to show off, as you might say. Anyway, I passed my examination without any trouble, was accepted for service in the Foreign Legion and received my commission as gunner, dated Friday, January 1, 1915.

There is no use in my describing the Foreign Legion. It is one of the most famous fighting organizations in the world, and has made a wonderful record during the war. When I joined La Legion, it numbered about 60,000 men. Today it has less than 8,000. They say that since August, 1914, the legion has been wiped out three times, and that there are only a few men still in service who belonged to the original legion. I believe it to be true. In January of this year the French government decided to let the legion die. I was sorry to hear it. The legionnaires were a fine body of men, and wonderful fighters. But the whole civilized world is now fighting the Huns, and Americans do not have to enlist with the French or the Limeys any longer.

But one thing about the legion, that I find many people do not know, is that the legionnaires are used for either land or sea service. They are sent wherever they can be used. I do not know whether this was the case before the present war—I think not—but in my time, many of the men were put on ships. Most people, however, have the idea that they are only used in the infantry.

With my commission as gunner, I received orders to go to Brest and join the dreadnaught Cassard. This assigament tickled me, for my pal Murray was aboard, and I had expected trouble in transferring to his ship in case I was assigned elsewhere. We had framed it up to stick together as long as we could. We did, too.

Murray was as glad as I was when I came aboard, and he told me he had heard Brown, our other pal, had been made a sergeant in another regiment of the legion.

We were both surprised at some of the differences between the French navy and ours, but after we got used to it, we thought many of their customs improvements over ours. But we could not get used to it, at first. For instance, on an American ship, when you are pounding your ear in a nice warm hammock and it is time to relieve the watch on deck, like as not you will be awakened gently by a burly garby armed with a fairy wand about the size of a bed slat, whereas in French ships, when they call the watch, you would think you were in a swell hotel and had left word at the desk. It was hard to turn out at first, without the aid of a club, and harder still to break ourselves of the habit he calling our relief in the gay and festive American manner, but, as I say, we got to like it after a while.

Then, too, they do not do any hazing in the French navy, and this surprised us. We had expected to go through the mill just as we did when we joined the American service, but nobody slung a hand at us. On the contrary, every garby aboard was kind and decent and extremely courteous, and the fact that we were from the States counted a lot with them. They used to brag about it to the crews of other ships that were not so honored.

But this kindness we might have expected. It is just like Frenchmen in any walk of life. With hardly an exception, I have never met one of this nationality who was not anxious to help you in any way he could; extremely generous, though not reckless with small change, and almost always cheery and there with a smile in any weather. A fellow asked me once why it was that almost the whole world loves the French, and I told him it was because the French love almost the whole world, and show it. And I think that is the reason, too.

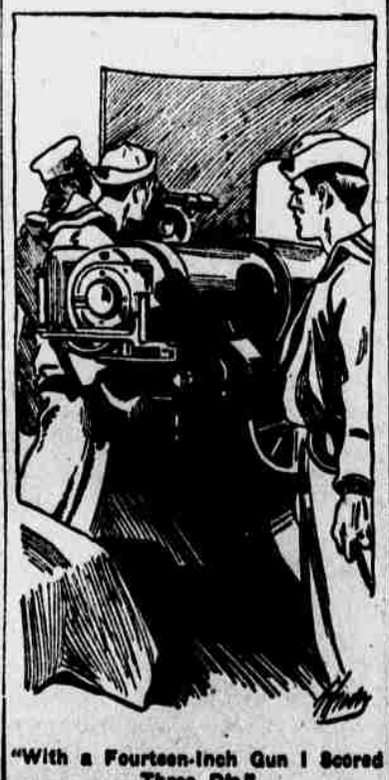
About the only way you can describe the Poilus, on land or sea, is that they are gentle. That is, you always think that word when you see one and talk to him—unless you happen to see him within bayonet distance of Fritz.

The French sailors sleep between decks in bunks, instead of hammocks, and as I had not slept in a bunk since my Southerndown days, it was pretty hard on me. So I got hold of some heaving line, which is one-quarter-inch rope, and rigged up a hammock. In my spare time I taught the others how to make them, and pretty soon everybody was doing it.

When I taught the sailors to make hammocks, I figured, of course, that they would use them as we did—that is, sleep in them. They were greatly pleased at first, but after they had tried the stunt of getting in and staying in, it was another story. A hammock is like some other things—it works while you sleep—and if you are not on to it, you spend most of your sleeping time hitting the floor. Our gun captain thought I had put over a trick hammock on him, but I did not need to; every hammock is a trick hammock.

Also, I taught them the way we make mats out of rope, to use while sleeping on the steel gratings near the entrance to stoke holes. In cold weather this part of the ship is more comfortable than the ordinary sleeping quarters, but without a mat it gets too hot.

American soldiers and sailors get the best food in the world, but while the French navy chow was not fancy, it was clean and hearty, as they say



"With a Fourteen-inch Gun I Scored Three D'a."

down East. For breakfast we had bread and coffee and sardines; at noon a boiled dinner, mostly beans, which were old friends of mine, and of the well-named navy variety; at four in the afternoon, a pint of vino, and at six, a supper of soup, coffee, bread and beans.

Although the French "seventy-five" is the best gun in the world, their naval guns are not as good as ours, and their gunners are mostly older men. But they will give a youngster a gun rating if he shows the stuff.

Shortly after I went aboard the Cassard, we received instructions to proceed to Spezia, Italy, the large Italian naval base. The voyage was without incident, but when we dropped anchor in Spezia, the Italian port officials quarantined us for fourteen days on account of smallpox. During this period our food was pretty bad; in fact, the meat became rotten. This could hardly have happened on an American ship, because they are provisioned with canned stuff and preserved meats, but the French ships, like the Italian, depend on live stock, fresh vegetables, etc., which they carry on board, and we had expected to get a large supply of such stuff at Spezia. Long before the fourteen days were up we were out of these things, and had to live on anything we could get hold of—mostly hardtack, coffee and cocoa.

We loaded a cargo of airplanes for the Italian aviators at the French flying schools, and started back to Brest. On the way back we had target practice. In fact, at most times on the open sea, it was a regular part of the routine.

It was during one of these practices that the French officers wanted to find out what the Yankee gunner knew about gunnery. At a range of eight miles, while the ship was making eight knots an hour, with a fourteen-inch gun I scored three d's—that is, three direct hits out of five trials. After that there was no question about it. As a result, I was awarded three bars. These bars, which are strips of red braid, are worn on the left sleeve, and signify extra marksmanship. I also received two hundred and fifty francs, or about fifty dollars in American money, and fourteen days' shore leave.

All this made me very angry, oh, very much wrought up indeed—not! I saw a merry life for myself on the French rolling wave if they felt that way about gunnery.

I spent most of my leave with my grandmother in St. Nazaire, except for a short trip I made to a star-shell factory. This factory was just about like one I saw later somewhere in America, only in the French works, all the hands were women. Only the guards were men, and they were "blesses" (wounded).

When my leave was up and I said good-by to my grandmother, she managed a smile for me, though I could see that it was pretty stiff work. And without getting soft, or anything like that, I can tell you that smile stayed with me and it did me more good than you would believe, because it gave me something good to think about when I was up against the real thing.

I hope a lot of you people who read this book are women, because I have had it in mind for some time to tell all the women I could a little thing they can do that will help a lot. I am not trying to be fancy about it, and I hope you will take it from me the way I mean it.

When you say good-by to your son or your husband or your sweetheart, work up a smile for him. What you want to do is to give him something he can think about over there, and something he will like to think about. There is so much dirt, and blood, and hunger, and cold, and all that around you, that you have just got to quit thinking about it, or you will go crazy. And so, when you can think about something nice, you can pretty nearly forget all the rest for a while. The nicest things you can think about are the things you liked back home.

Now, you can take it from me that what your boy will like to remember the best of all is your face with a smile on it. He has got enough hell on his hands without a lot of weeps to remember, if you will excuse the word. But don't forget that the chances are on his side that he gets back to you; the figures prove it. That will help you some. At that, it will be hard work; you will feel more like crying, and so will he, maybe. But smile for him. That smile is your bit.

I will back a smile against the weeps in a race to Berlin any time. So I am telling you, and I cannot make it strong enough—send him away with a smile.

CHAPTER IV.
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On the Firing Line.

When I reported on the Cassard after my fourteen days' leave, I was detailed with a detachment of the legion to go to the Flanders front. I changed into the regular uniform of the legion, which is about like that of the infantry, with the regimental badge—a seven-flamed grenade.

We traveled from Brest by rail, in third-class cars, passing through La Havre and St. Pol, and finally arriving at Bergues. From Bergues we made the trip to Dixmude by truck—a distance of about twenty miles. We carried no rations with us, but at certain places along the line the train stopped, and we got out to eat our meals. At every railroad station they have booths or counters, and French girls work day and night feeding the Poilus. It was a wonderful sight to see these girls, and it made you feel good to think you were going to fight for them.

It was not only what they did, but the way they did it, and it is se things like this that the French beat the world. They could tell just what kind of treatment each Poilu needed, and they saw to it that he got it. They took special pains with the men of the legion, because, as they say, we are "strangers," and that means, "the best we have is yours" to the French. These French women, young and old, could be a mother and a sweetheart and a sister all at the same time to any hairy old ex-convict in the legion, and do it in a way that made him feel like a little boy at the time and a rich church member afterwards. The only thing we did not like about this trip was that there were not enough stations along that line. There is a tip that the French engineers will not take, I am afraid.

There is another thing about the French women that I have noticed, and that is this: There are pretty girls in every country under the sun, but the plain girls in France are prettier than the plain ones in other countries. They might not show it in photographs, but in action there is something about them that you cannot explain. I have never seen an ugly French girl who was not easy to look at.

We finally got to Dixmude, after having spent about eighteen hours on the way. On our arrival one company was sent to the reserve trenches and my company went to the front line trench. We were not placed in training camps, because most of us had been under fire before. I never had, but that was not supposed to make any difference. They say if you can stand the legion you can stand anything.

Before we entered the communication trench, we were drawn up alongside of a crossroad for a rest, and to receive certain accoutrements. Pretty soon we saw a bunch of Boches com-

"I Got Wan From Each of Thim Fellas."

ing along the road, without their guns, a few of them being slightly wounded. Some of them looked scared and others happy, but they all seemed tired. Then we heard some singing, and pretty soon we could see an Irish corporal stepping along behind the Huns, with his rifle slung over his back, and every once in a while he would shuffle a bit and then sing some more. He had a grin on him that pushed his ears back.

The British noncom who was detailed as our guide sang out: "What kind of time are you having, Pat?"

The Irishman saluted with one hand, dug the other into his pocket and pulled out enough watches to make you think you were in a pawn shop. "Oh, a foin toim I'm havin'," he says. "I got wan from each of thim fellas." We counted fourteen prisoners in the bunch. Pat sure thought he was rolling in wealth.

After we were rested up we were issued rifles, shrapnel helmets and belts, and then started down the communication trench. These trenches are entrances to the fighting trenches and run at varying angles and varying distances apart. They are seldom wide enough to hold more than one man, so you have to march single file in them. They wind in and out, according to the lay of the land, some parts of them being more dangerous than others. When you come to a dangerous spot you have to crawl sometimes.

There are so many cross trenches and blind alleys that you have to have a guide for a long time, because without one you are apt to walk through an embrasure in a fire trench and right out into the open, between the German front line and your own. Which is hardly worth while!

If any part of the line is under fire, the guide at the head of the line is on the lookout for shells, and when he hears one coming he gives the signal and you drop to the ground and wait until it bursts. You never get all the time you want, but at that you have plenty of time to think about things while you are lying there with your face in the mud, waiting to hear the sound of the explosion. When you hear it, you know you have got at least one more to dodge. If you do not hear it—well, most likely you are worrying more about tuning your thousand-string harp than anything else.

Depew gets his first experience in the front line trenches at Dixmude and learns how the British Tommies "carry on." He tells about it in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

She Earned It.

My little daughter came in with a penny. I asked her where she found it, and she said: "I earned it. You see, Carter called me a bad girl and I was going to fight him, but he had some pennies, so I told him if he would give me a penny I wouldn't fight him—and he did."

Homes of the Old Man.

"If women keep on taking up the essential work once performed by men," remarked a quiet observer "what a grand loafing spell father and some of his sons are going to have after the war. The dressmakers and school teachers' husbands used to have a monopoly on that sort of thing, but now we will have the steam riveters, conductorettes, truck drivers and chauffeurs' husbands. It begins to look as if the old man is coming into his own at last."

Much Whale Oil in Sight.

For the last 21 years whale fishing in Norwegian waters has been prohibited, and the whales have multiplied to an unexpected extent. According to carefully prepared estimates, the removal of the prohibition, which is probable, would result in the obtaining of not less than 20,000 tons of whale oil in the first year.

Initial Consequences.

"There is something off the coast which looks like an eyesore."

"Don't tell me it's a U-boat."